

PLATEILEMA (ASTERACEAE: HELENIEAE)
A NEW GENERIC REPORT FOR THE UNITED STATES

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The monotypic genus *Plateilema* was first proposed by Cockerell (1904) in his treatment of the genus *Hymenoxys* for North America, basing this upon *Actinella palmeri* A. Gray, the sole member of section *Plateilema*. The latter was maintained as a genus by subsequent workers (eg. Rydberg 1914), and I intend to accept its generic status in my forthcoming treatment of the Helenieae for Mexico (Turner 1999, in prep.).

The single species concerned, *Plateilema palmeri* (A. Gray) Cockerell, acaulescent perennial herb superficially resembling *Gaillardia comosa* A. Gray, has been largely ignored by most phyletic workers (eg. Bierner and Jansen 1998), presumably because it is represented in herbaria by relatively few collections, mostly type material, the latter obtained from near Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico. Indeed, prior to the present report, in addition to the type, the species was known by only a few skimpy collections from the Ocampo region of central Coahuila.

The present article calls attention to two collections of the species from the United States, 200 kilometers or more from the previously known collections (Fig. 1), as follows:

TEXAS. Brewster Co.: "Infrequent at Schuler mail box 44 mi S of Alpine; Terlingua Road; altitude 3,600 ft," 10 Apr 1929, *Henry T. Fletcher 219* (SRSC); "infrequent annual along Chalk Draw; Schuler Ranch; limestone soil; altitude 3,700 ft," 10 Apr 1929, *Henry T. Fletcher 884* (SRSC).

Henry T. Fletcher (1884–1955) was a remarkable man in the Brewster County region, serving his community in many ways: Vice President of the State National bank in Alpine, Rotary Club Governor, owner and manager of the Fletcher Cattle Company, to name but a few of his enterprises (Casey 1976). He was also an excellent collector and keen observer of range land plants, as attested to by his rarely cited but excellent publication for the times, *Vegetation of the Green Valley Region* (Fletcher 1928), a 40 km² of rolling plains with bordering mountains some 40–50 kms south of Alpine. Indeed, in a brief survey of the collections on file at SRSC, I calculate that he assembled and placed on deposit at that institution five thousand or more plant specimens. And his are not fragmentary collections as often collected by non botanists, rather they are neatly pressed, solidly mounted and in the best possible flowering and fruiting condition. In short, Fletcher collections served as the founding core of the SRSC herbarium, this subsequently built upon by the late Barton H. Warnock (Turner 1998).

Both of the above specimens were said to have been collected on the same date, but possess very different collection numbers (219 and 884), suggesting that the collec-

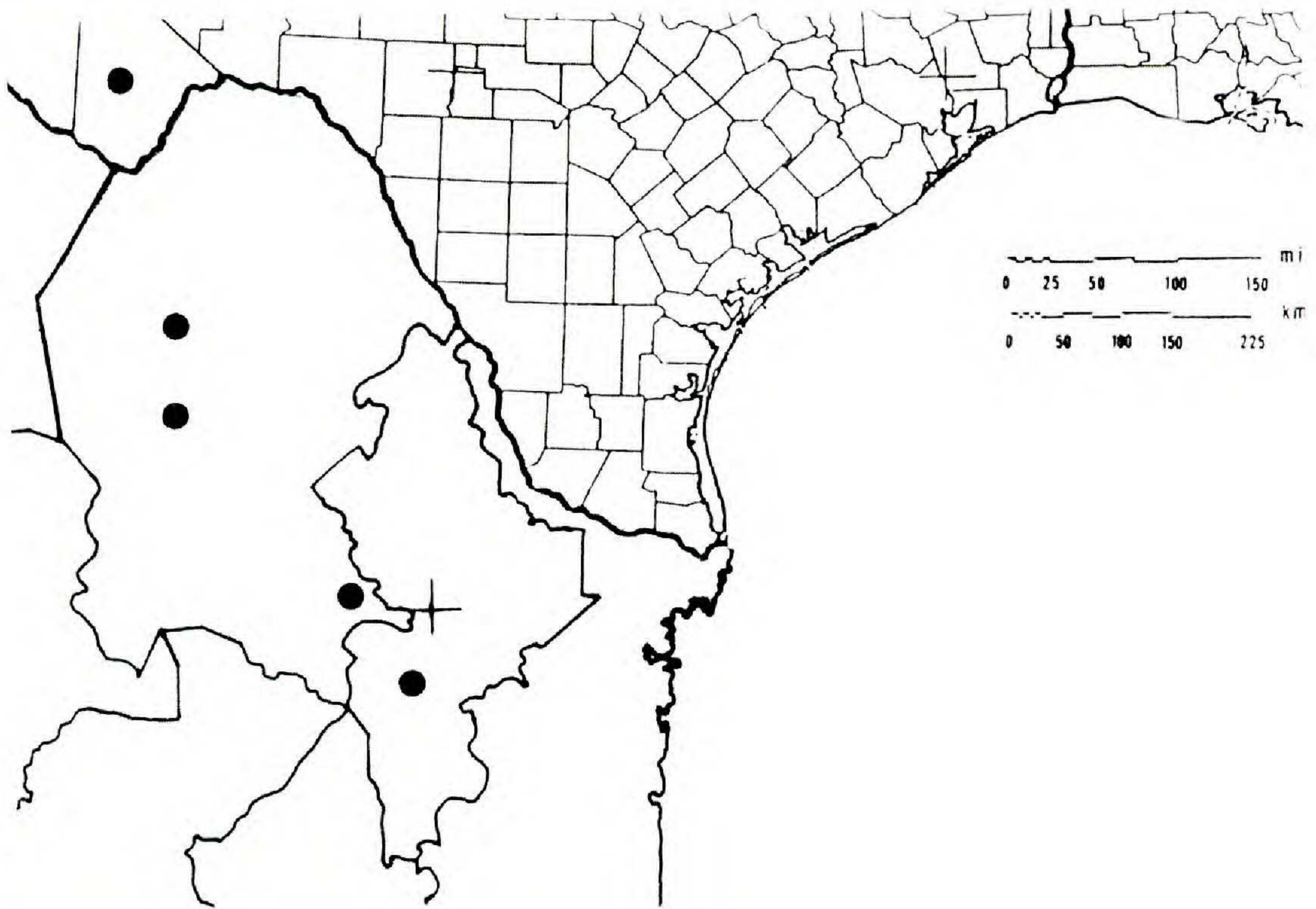


FIG. 1. Known distribution of *Plateilema palmeri*.

tor arbitrarily assigned his collection numbers and/or dates, or else he collected over 600 different specimens on the same date, an unlikely feat considering the time (April is usually a very dry month in the region concerned and even heavy early rains are unlikely to bring out a profusion of collectable species of this magnitude.)

No collection book or records survive to sort out the peculiar numbers assigned Fletcher's specimens, but most likely he assembled his plants over several months and then assigned his plants numbers irrespective of their order of collection; similar anomalies as that found with the numbers alluded to in the above are also encountered with other assemblages of this collector.

Since the above two sheets were only recently sorted out of a pile of unidentified specimens at SRSC, little opportunity has been available to search the area concerned to see if the species might still exist. My hunch is that they are still represented by small populations along Chalk Draw, a poorly collected area of the Big Bend region of Texas. Unfortunately, most ranchers in the trans-Pecos at the present time are reluctant to allow botanists on their ranchlands, fearful that an endangered taxon might be observed and as a result their use of their rangelands placed in some sort of jeopardy.

Finally, it should be noted that two recent collections of *Plateilema palmeri* have been made in the state of Nuevo Leon, Mpio. Galeana, Mexico, by the Hinton family (Hinton et al. 27195.TEX) some 100 kilometers south of the type locality. What was once thought to be a very localized species is now known to be quite widespread, albeit relatively rare, to judge from the collections at hand.

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